



## Andrew Johnson and his Slaves



Believed to be Dolly with Johnson's grandson



Sam



Dolly's son, William Andrew Johnson

### Andrew Johnson's Slaves

Andrew Johnson may have owned as many as eight slaves at once, the number never being large enough to exceed domestic duties. He never sold one.

Dolly and Sam, half-sister and brother, were purchased in 1842 at a slave auction in Greeneville, Tennessee. Dolly was about 14 years old at the time of purchase and Sam about 12.

According to William, Dolly's son, Dolly asked Johnson to buy her. "She looked around the crowd of buyers before the auction started, and she saw Andrew Johnson and liked his looks," William said. "So she went up to him and asked him if he wouldn't buy her."

Sam was purchased along with her. After Johnson's purchase, Dolly eventually had three children: Liz, Florence and William.

Sam was known as Johnson's favorite, probably because of his confident and independent nature. Johnson's daughter Martha once said, "Old Sam boast that he was my father's servant, but the fact is, my father was Sam's servant." Sam was allowed to choose jobs around town, like chopping wood and keep part of the money.

Sam was close to Johnson until his death and was one

of the few persons that knew where Johnson wanted to be buried.

No one is sure where the slaves lived, but there are a couple of ideas. They may have stayed in a cabin, about 20 by 30 feet, located on the Homestead grounds or in a basement room where the current kitchen is located.

Their duties would have been domestic, including tasks such as washing and ironing clothes, cooking, cleaning, gardening, caring for horses, caring for Johnson's wife Eliza while she was sick and working for others around town. Johnson took Florence with him to Washington, D.C.

Eliza Johnson taught William to cook and he later became a great pastry cook at Weaver's Grill in Knoxville. He said the Johnsons treated him like one of their own.

"He was a fine master, and I never could understand why he was impeached," William said. "I nursed him and was with him until he died in 1875. During his last 10 days, I always slept in his room as I had done when I was younger."

Liz, Dolly's daughter, moved to Knoxville by 1900 with her husband and nine children.

### Andrew Johnson's Evolving Attitudes About Slavery

Andrew Johnson worked hard to defend the Constitution. Originally, he believed in gradual emancipation, rather than immediate. He thought immediate emancipation would bring rebellion against the white race, preventing racial harmony.

His Gag Resolution Speech before Congress on January 31, 1844, demonstrates that he believed, "... that the black race of Africa were inferior to the white man in point of intellect - better calculated in physical structure to undergo drudgery and hardship ..."

However, by 1864, he was for immediate emancipation, proclaiming freedom for all Tennessee slaves. In February of 1865, he supported a constitutional amendment to abolish slavery in Tennessee. Later that year, as President, he strongly supported ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which abolished slavery nationwide.

Once the slaves were freed, he believed they should be included in the American political system as soon as possible. Johnson believed in immediate but qualified black voting rights for those educated in the duties of citizenship. He wanted immediate voting rights for all literate blacks that owned property. Once the rest were educated on citizenship, they could vote. The goal was full black voting rights.

In Andrew Johnson's speeches, his evolving attitudes are evident. Twenty years after his Gag Resolution Speech, on January 8, 1864, during a speech in Nashville he said, "Slavery is the cancer upon the body politic, which must be rooted out before perfect health can be restored." In the same speech he said, "I have owned slaves ... They were confiscated and sold; yet two of them ran away from the Rebel dominions and came here to me. I hired them - made a bargain with them for their labor, and thus recognized their freedom ... Now if any of you are slaveowners, I advise you to go and do likewise, while you have a chance."